

Petitioner submission of 1 February 2023

PE1919/K: Ban the sale of high caffeine products to children for performance enhancement

I would like to make the petitions committee aware of this advice I came across from US Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) on caffeine.

<https://www.usada.org/athletes/substances/supplement-connect/recognize-risk-when-you-see-it/energy-drinks/five-things-know-energy-drinks/>

In particular, where it says energy drinks should not be used before, during or after exercise because they pose additional health risks including the adverse effects from caffeine. It further states “*the reality is that energy drinks, though advertised to help, can severely damage an athlete’s health and are especially risky for young athletes*”.

I have since made USADA aware of the petition. They responded saying they were glad I contacted them and have asked to be kept posted on the outcome of the petition. They have included the director of their True Sport program in the conversation and are considering developing something on caffeine products and caffeine gum for educational purposes.

I also came across another article first warning of the dangers of caffeine gum reported in the Lancet as far back as 2009.

Doctors warn over dangers of high-caffeine gum | Nursing Times
(<https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/primary-care/doctors-warn-over-dangers-of-high-caffeine-gum-29-05-2009/>)

Worryingly, the 320mg taken over a 4 hour period which resulted in the 13 year old being hospitalised is less than the 400mg recommended safe dose quoted on high strength caffeine gum promoted and handed out to athletes, including U18s, at mass participation running events in Scotland and Wales. It would not be unreasonable to say that this caffeine dose is likely to pose an even greater risk to a child or adolescent if taken before or during intense physical exercise. Food Standards Scotland acknowledged they are aware of products containing caffeine which, if consumed in one sitting or over a short period of time, would be above the safe levels for U18s.

It's important to highlight the EFSA advice on single doses of 200mg only applies to the healthy adult population - there are no studies available on health risks for U18s or middle aged/elderly subjects taking an acute dose of 200mg before intense physical exercise.

“Single doses of caffeine up to 200mg – about 3mg per kilogram of body weight (mg/kg bw) from all sources do not raise safety concerns for the general healthy adult population. The same amount of caffeine does not raise safety concerns even when consumed less than two hours prior to intense physical exercise under normal environmental conditions. No studies are available in pregnant women or middle aged/elderly subjects undertaking intense physical exercise.”

I would call on the Petitions Committee to ask UK Athletics to provide evidence showing it is safe for U18s to use high strength caffeine gum for performance enhancement and make available any data on athletes harmed taking acute doses of caffeine, in particular U18s.